

cutting the workpiece with the laser beam;

E1  
wherein the optical means is of the multifocus type,  
the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing at least  
90% nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to  
the nozzle.--

---

Cancel claim 3. /

Amend claim 12 as follows:

---

E2  
--12. (amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the  
assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing from 92 to  
98% nitrogen.--

---

Add the following new claims:

---

E3  
--22. (new) A method of cutting the workpiece made of  
stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum or aluminum alloy,  
comprising the steps of:

providing at least one transparent or reflecting  
optical means for focusing at least one laser beam, comprising a  
nozzle;

providing at least one assist gas to the nozzle under  
pressure; and

cutting the workpiece with the laser beam;

wherein the optical means is of the multifocus type,  
the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture having an oxygen  
content greater than 0% by volume and less than 8% by volume, the  
rest being nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is  
supplied to the nozzle.

--23. (new) The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the multifocus optical means is chosen from lenses, mirrors and combinations thereof.

23 --24. (new) The method of claim 23, wherein the multifocus optical means comprises a bifocal lens.

--25. (new) The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing at least 90% nitrogen.

--26. (new) The method of claim 25, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing from 92 to 98% nitrogen.

--27. (new) The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content between 150 ppm by volume and 5% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.

--28. (new) The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the optical means is arranged so as to obtain at least one first focusing point positioned near the upper surface of the workpiece to be cut, or in the thickness of the workpiece to be cut in a region close to said upper surface, and at least one second focusing point positioned near the lower surface of the workpiece to be cut and in the thickness of the latter, or beyond the latter.